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(Frontispiece)

THE CHURCH MUST FIRST REPENT

CHAPTERS ON REVIVAL

By
J. EDWIN ORR
Author of "Such Things Happen"

Foreword by
THE EDITOR OF "THE CHRISTIAN"

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FOREWORD

It was claimed for a book which appeared during the great Revival in England and America eighty years ago, and profoundly influenced its course, that men read it upon their knees. Here, too, is a book which should drive many to humble themselves before the face of God. Its theme is Revival—no hackneyed topic surely, but the most urgent of all questions confronting the Church of Christ. Who can deny that the awakening of the Lord's people to a proper sense of their responsibility before Him, is the key to the solution of the moral and spiritual problems of the present hour? The fishermen of Galilee, lacking faith, trembled in the presence of the powers of evil. They deserted the Master when He needed them most, and hid themselves behind shut doors. Yet, a few weeks later, we behold them, energized by the Holy Ghost, emerging with boldness to proclaim Christ everywhere, and actually beginning to turn the world upside down.

Do we believe that the same Power which wrought that mighty transformation is at the disposal of the Church to-day? That is the chal-

lenge of these pages. Here is a trumpet-blast, a summons to all who profess and call themselves Christians to consider their ways, to mark their failures, and, with contrite hearts, to dedicate themselves without reserve to the Lord for whatever He may appoint.

Now and again, it may be, some bold conclusion of the author's may disturb our complacency, and even provoke us to dissent. But let us not dismiss a challenging opinion until we have allowed it to search our hearts, and until we are thoroughly satisfied that we are blameless before God.

Mr. Orr has a right to be heard, for he speaks out of an experience of divine leading and blessing, so rich and varied, as to enable him to bear a unique testimony to the faithfulness of God. The record of the Lord's dealings with him is to be found in eight volumes which have commanded a phenomenal circulation in all parts of the English-speaking world. Those who have derived inspiration from their glowing pages will accord a hearty welcome to the book now before us.

CHAS. T. COOK.

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CHAPTER I
TIME WE WAKENED UP

"Wilt thou not revive us again : that thy people
may rejoice in thee ?" Psa. lxxxv. 6.

CHAPTER I

TIME WE WAKENED UP

QUITE recently, it was my privilege to have a cordial conversation with a minister whose theological training placed him among the school of thought, described as "modernist" by opponents, but dubbed "advanced thinkers" by themselves.

"Why is it," I asked him, "that a man of your thinking is eager to co-operate with an evangelist whom you would call 'a conservative evangelical'?"

"I'll tell you," he said. "It's the bankruptcy of our liberal gospel. I was trained to think in a certain way, and I suppose I could be described as a modernist even now. But the Abyssinian War was the most upsetting factor in my calculations for many a year.

"You know, Orr," he went on, "that I and many like me had felt that the Kingdom of God on earth was just round the corner, and that the principles of Christ were permeating the nations in every way. Our friend, Il Duce, crumpled the dream like a ball of paper.

"And it has left us stranded. We have been

forced to reconsider everything. Yes. The war in Ethiopia was a tragic thing for Ethiopians. But I'll tell you what it did for me. It made me see that we'll never get the nations to follow Christ, until we get men converted. So I am back to the old emphasis—Ye must be born again—same as you, Orr!”

It is about time we wakened up.
We need a revival.

It is truly remarkable how much the hearts of people are being turned nowadays toward this very subject of revival. His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury has made his appeal to the British nation—the much-discussed, much-applauded, much-derided Recall to Religion. The appeal means something. It is significant beyond measure, for it attempts to clothe (in archiepiscopal words) the yearning of all classes for something, something from God.

It was likewise strange how the Almighty used the regretted Constitutional Crisis to stir the conscience of a backslidden but professedly-Christian nation. That tragedy engraved the sanctity of marriage upon the minds of the common people, and it focused attention upon the ever-high standards of Christian living. As a result, it is easier

to discuss religion. And revival is a less obsolete word now. I know that the expression of the yearning after God is oft-times crude. I don't care. Every time a Sunday newspaper devotes a page to the Bible—and acquaintances tell me that it is a growing habit—I rejoice because I know that Fleet Street has its fingers upon the pulse of the nation. Fleet Street caters for the masses. If they want capital ess, capital ee, capital ex—Fleet Street seldom disappoints them. If they hunger after God, the newshawks stalk a neglected quarry, and the result is an increasing number of articles on religion. I remember that when the Lord was blessing our meetings in Western Australia, one enterprising editor interviewed everybody religious—including the parish priests of the Roman Catholic Church, and certain blatant but baptised agnostics—on “The Possibility of a Religious Revival.” It amused me, but it was significant. The Editor knew what his readers were talking about. The world is hungry—and it cannot find a name for its unusual appetite. And just as some men smoke to stave off hunger, so the world turns to the fumes of pleasure to quench the craving for food for the soul.

My dictionary defines *revival* thus :

“Recovery from languor, neglect or depression : renewed performance, as of a play : a time of extraordinary religious awakening : renewal of trade.”

To a Christian, a revival is certainly a time of religious awakening, and that is the definition that we shall use. But even in the religious world, *revival* is a misunderstood word. In one part of the United States, "a revival" is a Church membership drive, invariably arranged during August. To others, even in England, a revival is nothing more than an evangelistic campaign. One must point out that a revival may produce an evangelistic campaign: and conversely, an evangelistic campaign may produce a revival. But it is imperative that the Christian should know that a revival is an awakening brought about by the Blessed Holy Spirit in the hearts of believing people. It is not the concern of the outside world—save inasmuch as revived Christians win their unconverted friends and enemies.

Charles G. Finney, whose legal mind and powerful preaching made him at once the greatest theorist and the greatest demonstrator of revival in recent history, deals with fundamentals when he writes: "A revival of religion presupposes a declension."

Let us study the matter further. Consider the Great Commission given by our Lord before His Ascension—"All power is given unto Me . . . Go ye therefore . . . Lo, I am with you alway . . ."

History has recorded the obedience of the first generation of Christians to that command—from

different points of view. But it is patent that the world got to know about the Great Propaganda in record time. Someone has estimated that they carried the Gospel to ten million people within the space of the first century.

Comparison with the activity of to-day would be odious. In spite of the multitude of missionary agencies, the efforts of our generation of Christians is not even keeping pace with the normal growth of population. It is a fact that there are millions more heathen to-day in China than when Hudson Taylor first set foot in that vast country. There are millions more heathen in Africa to-day than when Livingstone first heard the roar of Victoria Falls, the "smoke that thunders." Millions more profess the creed of Islam than when Raymond Lull laid down his life in North Africa.

What better is it in Christendom? Even in the homelands, we have growing indifference and open pagan culture. The need of revival, widely admitted to-day, presupposes a declension. What has caused the declension? Only one thing. Backsliding in the Church.

Once upon a time, I went to see my sister's first baby.

"But he is very small," I told her.

"Not at all," said she, "he's seven pounds in weight."

"Well. That's not much!"

"Never mind. He'll grow."

And grow he did. I quite suppose that my little nephew will be a tall man one day, perhaps five foot eleven, like his father, and most likely more than the five foot seven of his uncle Ebby, as he called me at first. There we have a type of normal growth.

But take another example. When I was engaged in Rover Scout work, I distributed parcels at Christmas time to little crippled children. One boy that I met had been born a year after the return of his war-maimed father. This baby had been apparently normal, but as the months rolled by, their rosy hopes of him were not justified. To-day he is nineteen years old—but he is a cripple. He cannot bath himself any more than a baby. He cannot feed himself. He cannot put on his clothes. He cannot talk any more than a four-year-old. The poor fellow is a burden to his family as well as a tragedy to himself. Why? Why, you ask me. Two words explain. *Infantile Paralysis.*

Likewise, it is spiritual Infantile Paralysis that cripples the Church to-day in many of its members—yes, even in the best evangelical circles. The majority of born-again people have not grown up. They cannot feed themselves. They cannot cleanse themselves. They cannot even rest themselves in

the promises of their Father. They are a tragedy to themselves and a burden to the family.

Now the cure for all this is revival. Study the Old Testament. Enquire in the New. Read up Church history. You will find that the cure for every great apostasy or backsliding was nothing short of a revival. Revival is God's intervention when His people are on the down-grade.

Take, for instance, the great evangelical movement under the Wesleys and their contemporaries. It affected not only Methodism, but it moulded the Church of England, and crystallised the Evangelical party there, besides stirring every other denomination. A secular historian says that it saved England from the terrors of a "French Revolution" and its welter of blood. France expelled the Huguenots and the Revolution followed: and to-day France is dominated by a pagan philosophy, the heritage of the eighteenth century. England welcomed the Reformation and revival followed. We thank God for the influence which remains in the body of the nation.

And do we really need revival nowadays? Of course we do. It is the crying need of the hour.

A short time ago, I was talking to a dear friend and prayer partner of mine, Evan Roberts, whom God used so mightily in the great Welsh revival. I quote him from memory.

■

"People ask me, my brother," he said, "if I see any signs of the revival for whose coming we all pray. Now, as you travel about, you may see the positive signs, but I am not so privileged just now. I tell them that I see all the *negative* signs. The churches seem to be at rock-bottom in their decline. The turning point is at hand.

"Indeed," he went on, "I would compare the state of the true Church to-day with the state of the prodigal son in the far country *just before he went home to his father*. Mark you, he has not started for home yet . . . he is still among the swine and the husks, but he is 'utterly fed-up.' As I would have said of the prodigal son, 'He won't be there much longer'—so I predict of the Church as it is to-day."

It is about time we wakened up.

CHAPTER II

THE CHALLENGE OF GOD

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Malachi iii. 10.

CHAPTER II

THE CHALLENGE OF GOD

"God," says Finney, "has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind, to produce powerful excitements among them, before He can lead them to obey. Men are so sluggish, there are so many things to lead their minds off from religion and to oppose the influence of the gospel, that it is necessary to raise an excitement among them, till the tide rises so high as to sweep away the opposing obstacles."

The hope of revival, whether we emphasise the lower aspect of an excitement among men or the higher view of a visitation from God, is found only in the promises of God.

God has undoubtedly promised to cure the backsliding of His people, but His promises are always conditional. Here is one.

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and *prove me now* herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

That will apply to to-day. And remember, the Bible is full of such promises. Accepting the promises of God means *revival*.

I would like to quote the words of my good friend, Rev. T. Gear Willet of the China Inland Mission: "The revival we pray for must be as deep and abiding as the promises of God."

And the promises of God are sufficient for all our need.

We have quoted the Prophet Malachi, so let us go on to study his message. Malachi, in Hebrew, means "God's messenger." Nothing is known of this prophet save that he is presumed to be a contemporary of Nehemiah.

The prophecy of Malachi assumes the form of a dialogue between God and His People. The words "Ye say," alternate with the words "Thus saith the Lord." We have man's opinion contrasted with the decree of God.

One likes to hear a positive message. I was surprised when a preacher of somewhat modernist views told me: "I have come to think, Mr. Orr, that unless we preachers can preface our sermons with 'Thus saith the Lord,' it is a sheer waste of time—and we had better shut up and sit down."

Those are exactly my own sentiments.

Malachi's challenge was a positive and emphatic one.

First of all, he challenged the nation regarding its indifference to God's love.¹

It is amazing to see the similarity in comparing *those* general conditions with our own modern world. The world despises God's love. There was a day when the mention of God's love made men weep. But not so now. Their ears are deaf because of sin. The man-in-the-street regards God as a good-natured old fellow. The weak and watery preaching of sentimentality and soft words is responsible for that. Away with such an idea. God is a God of Love, but He is also a God of judgment.

Malachi complains that the people dishonour God.² "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is my honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests that despise my name."

Isn't it the same to-day? They have whittled away the character of God until the outsider despises Him. All the sloppy sentimentality, shaping God to suit men, has caused this dishonour to the Almighty. They talked about the Fatherhood of God—and now some have begun (blasphemously) to mention the Grandfatherhood of God. God is not a far-away, impotent grandfather. We need to get back to preaching the fear of God.

In the next seven verses, the prophet denounces

¹ Chapter I, verse 2.

² Verse 6.

pollution, neglect, profanity, deceit and corruption in the worship of God. We have all these things to-day.

He complains that we cheat friends¹, and how true it is of the world to-day. Commerce is like a den of wolves. The next verse complains of inter-marriage with unbelievers. How often we find examples of that in the churches. A bright young Christian falls in love with a worldly girl, and that is the end of the bright young Christian. He stops coming to church; he turns away from God.

Verses 14 to 16 deal with that vexed question of modern times, divorce and adultery. So far as easy divorce is concerned, we must remember Malachi's declaration for God: "For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away."

The last verse of the chapter deals with the question of honouring sinners. Why should we honour sinners? Yet it is done to-day.

As in the days of Malachi, so to-day God is against the sorcerers, the adulterers, the false witnesses, and the oppressors of the working man and the widows.

"Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from my ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, wherein shall we return?"

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me.

¹ Chapter 2, Verse 10.

But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings."

Permit a word regarding this matter. I have been all round the world, and my conclusion on the matter of Church finance is this: the standard of giving at home is shameful. I am speaking of Church support, not special meetings, and this has no reference to paying an evangelist. Why is the standard of giving so low?

Some people give nothing more than a penny towards the collection. A penny for God. If it was a widow's mite, it would be appreciated, but it is not usually the case. It is the regular contribution of an average Christian. Shame! Some Christians would be ashamed to tip a waiter with the coin they give to God. No wonder we read:

"Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation."

Now we reach the climax in the challenge of Malachi. The conditions prevailing in his day are those around us to-day. So also his challenge is the challenge for the moment.

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, so that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

There we have God's challenge.

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse" certainly applies to material support of God's work. But it may be also read, "Fulfil all your obligations first," and there we have the spiritual truth.

We must prove God's promises. And we must prove them *now*. The promise of blessing follows, and what a promise it is. The Hebrew word for "windows of heaven" is translated by our Norwegian friends "sluser" which means "sluice-gates" in English. Have you ever seen a weir?—then you know what it is like to watch the water burst through the open flood-gates. That is what God promises.

"I don't believe in revival!" says somebody of importance.

"Don't you?"

"No. I think that it is much better that things should go on as usual, and that the Church should make steady progress apart from periodic excitements."

That statement reflects the mind of many ministers and Church leaders. Sometimes an evangelist arrives from far away, conducts a mission, wins a number of converts, and then makes his departure. On the credit side—there were good attendances; the collections covered every expense: some of the converts look like making a good confession:

some younger Christians have been stirred into activity. On the debit side—the minister, who preaches two hundred times a year to the same folk, finds that his preaching is being compared unfavourably with that of the evangelist, who often has only a score of well-proved, stock sermons; and the grumblers want to know why their minister, in normal Church routine, cannot attract such huge crowds as the other fellow, overlooking the fact of intensive campaign advertisement: some of the Church people who live for excitement go and look for it somewhere else: a few of the converts are so shallow that they are a disgrace to the cause: and some of the stirred up Christians stick in the mud once more! Says the organiser to himself: "Was it worth while?"

But—think for a moment! We have been discussing an evangelistic campaign, not a revival. And unless the Lord sends a revival *with* the evangelistic campaign, it is at the best only *man's* endeavour to do God's work.

Now consider for a moment the *known* results of *real* revival. Crowded churches apart from advertisement; abundant offerings to God's work; sustained prayer meetings; perfect unity and love among Christians; Church members stirred and lifted to a higher plane: sinners being converted day after day. Have you any objection to that? No?

Well, that is revival. In ignorance, many leaders confuse campaigns with revival. The reason is simple: they have never seen a real revival.

Let us go back to our questions. We quote the verse from Psalm lxxxv: "Wilt *Thou* not revive us again?"

"To whom does that 'Thou' refer?"

"To God, of course."

"Then that seems to suggest that God is the source of revival. Do you agree?"

We next quote from Acts: "Times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." It is agreed that this verse teaches the same lesson.

"Now for a blunt question. Would you object to a revival sent by God?"

"Oh, no. But there are things that happen in revivals, and I cannot imagine that they come from God."

"But you admit that God's ways are not your ways? And you know that the devil sows tares wherever the Lord sows wheat? And you agree that you may have unfounded prejudices?"

"Well——"

"All right. We have agreed that the source of revival is the Lord. We'll agree likewise to pray that *the Lord* in His wisdom *may send* the revival that we need."

Lord, wilt *Thou* not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?

CHAPTER III

SO MUCH INCONSISTENCY

"Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues."
Psa. lxxviii. 36.

CHAPTER III

SO MUCH INCONSISTENCY

MANY Christians are puzzled by the long delay in the coming of the revival so much desired. The reason may be summed up in one word—inconsistency.

Almost every Christian nowadays is well acquainted with the words of popular hymns which enshrine for all time the longing and desire for revival. We all sing :

God is here, and that to bless us
With the Spirit's quickening power :
See the cloud already bending
Waits to drop the grateful shower.

And the refrain is often sung thus :

Let it come, O Lord, we pray Thee :
Let the shower of blessing fall :
We are waiting and expecting—
O revive the hearts of all.

Now, if one were to analyse the situation and to take a concensus of opinion in an average meeting, the results would be bewildering.

"Do you believe that God is here and that to bless us?"

"Oh, yes. Most certainly I do."

"And you are really eager that the cloud already bending should drop the grateful shower."

"Of course," is the reply. "That's why we sing: 'Let it come!'"

"Well, then," I ask, "why hasn't it come?"
No reply.

"Listen. You agree that the Spirit's quickening power is here at hand, and you believe that God is willing to give a mighty blessing. Now, then, do you really expect a great revival in your midst to-day, to-night?"

And if the embarrassed witness were to say what he thinks, he would explain: "Well, not exactly to-night. Sometime—well, maybe not to-morrow either. But it *will* come. We are expecting revival. But not to-day."

It has been truly said: To-morrow never comes. And the revival of to-morrow will never come either. Revival comes to the people of *to-day*.

Take another example—another hymn of petition which is sung with great fervour everywhere.

Showers of blessing,
Showers of blessing we need;
Mercy drops round us are falling,
But for the showers we plead.

The "mercy drops" are generally interpreted as a description of the present measure of blessing. Now if you go out in thundery weather, and a few heavy drops fall—well, you get ready for a big shower. Sometimes, however, it is a false alarm. The clouds blow round, and it rains elsewhere. But if it kept on dropping—"spitting" is what we Irish vulgarly but expressively say to describe it—dropping big raindrops for weeks and weeks, but no shower following, you would say: "It's a long time coming." Has it not occurred to you that the showers of blessing are a long time coming? Is there something wrong?

"But for the showers we plead!"

We only *think* we plead for them. Let us be reasonable. Can you imagine a deaf God and a pleading people? Is God deaf? Is the Almighty asleep? Is the Lord on holiday?

You are somewhat shocked, and you murmur "No!"

Then why does He give no answer to the united prayers of His people? I'll tell you. It is because they do not mean what they say. My friend, every time you sing a revival hymn, every time you pray for revival, think of the verses of the seventy-eighth psalm:

"Nevertheless, they did *flatter* God with their

mouths, and they *lied* unto Him with their tongues. For their heart *was not right* with Him, neither were they *steadfast* in His covenant."

There, in a nutshell, you have the reason for unanswered prayer. Inconsistency.

God has a controversy with His people. On the one side, we know the record of God, and all His mighty works. That seventy-eighth psalm, already quoted, gives us a picture of things as they are. It paints as well the failures of God's people. Read it for yourself.

The first eight verses show the purpose of the psalm. It is a call to remembrance—and wherefore? That the generations to come might know of God's working. That children unborn might "set their hope in God." That we might not "forget the works of God, but keep His commandments": and might not be as our fathers, a stubborn and rebellious race.

We need reminders *to set our hope in God*.¹ I for one cannot read the story of the great revival of 1839 without praying that my home country may again be turned inside out.

But the frailty of humans is made plain in this

¹ God mixed up in our own generation a godly couple, Dr. and Mrs. Henry Woods of New Jersey, whose ministry has been chiefly that of circulating an amazing amount of free literature. The chief object of this literature is to make it utterly impossible to forget the workings of God in these past hundred years. Their very telling of revival has quickened the hope in others.

Psalm. They "turned back" in the day of battle . . . they "kept not their bargain with God" . . . they "refused to walk in His law" . . . they "forgot His works and His wonders that He shewed them."

The psalmist here, in bewailing the shortcomings of God's people, turns to a recitation of what God had already done for them. I am forced to think of present-day affairs. Last year, 1937, the Christians of Britain and America have been celebrating the life of D. L. Moody. Great testimonies have been given on every hand regarding what God accomplished through D. L. Moody. What I want to know is: is D. L. Moody's God still alive?

We read in the psalm of God's *deliverances*—as when He divided the Red Sea for the fleeing Israelites. We note His *leadership*—as by the pillar of cloud by day, the light of fire by night. We find that His *provision* was unfailing—as through streams in the desert, water from the cloven rock. Cannot we ask ourselves—Has not God *delivered* us likewise? Has not the Lord *led* us as well? Has not the Almighty *provided* for us also?

And what did His people do? What did they do then? What do we do to-day? "They sinned yet more against Him by provoking the Most High . . ." . . . "They tempted God in their heart . . ." . . . "They spake against God. . . ."

No wonder God was angry. In spite of all that He had done for them.

"They believed not in God, and trusted not in His salvation."

Although He "commanded the clouds from above" . . . "opened the doors of heaven" . . . "rained down manna" . . . gave them "the corn of heaven" and "their own desire";

Yet "they were not estranged from their lust."

How true it is of the Church to-day. Our bad memory regarding God's workings, and our unbelief, is no better than that of the most provoking Israelite. Even God's anger does not awaken us. "For all this they sinned still, and believed not for His wondrous works."

A verse that follows strikes me as being forcefully descriptive of the partial revivals experienced among Christians to-day. "They returned and enquired early after God . . . and they remembered that God was their Rock. . . ."

And did it last? No.

And why?

"Nevertheless they did flatter Him with their mouth, and they lied unto Him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant."

In so many words, the rebuke of the Lord shamed them into seeking His blessing, but even then their

prayers, like ours, were negated by inconsistency, and nullified by insincerity.

The Psalmist turns away from such a hopeless crowd, and speaks again of the consistent God of mercies.

"But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath. For He remembered that they were but flesh: a wind that passeth and cometh not again."

The patience of God is amazing. It passes our finite minds to comprehend His forbearance. "How oft did they provoke Him" . . . how often did they "grieve Him."

"Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel."

The lesson that this psalm has for us is simple though tragic. We puny humans *can* hinder God. The inconsistency, the insincerity, the unbelief of Christians . . . *limits* God. We don't mean what we say. We don't believe what we profess. We are humbugs.

Listen. Note this and don't forget.

God is able and willing to give us revival. He is more willing to give than we are to receive. The hindrance lies in our inconsistency.

So, the next time you sing a revival hymn or pray a revival prayer, make sure that you mean it.

As soon as you and all of us seek God's face in sincerity, just as soon will He begin the work of reviving in your heart and ours and in others.

Glance over the remainder of the lengthy psalm.

"Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep . . . He smote His enemies . . . He built His sanctuary . . . He fed His people . . . and guided them. . . ."

"Lord, make me more consistent,

More sincere, more true :

Forgive me now for limiting

What Thou in me wouldst do."

CHAPTER IV

CONDITIONS FOR REVIVAL

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." 2 Chron. vii. 14.

CHAPTER IV

CONDITIONS FOR REVIVAL

THE word Revival, in its ordinary sense, means the coming of life and renewal to something that has already possessed life.

Let us take an example in nature. We walk into the garden during the winter season, and there we see the old oak tree—leafless. There it has stood, for several months, a sorry sight—a few withered leaves hanging on empty branches as if in self-pity. To all outward appearances, it is dead. But come back again with me next month and I will show you a wondrous thing—little buds of beautiful, delicate green pushing their way upwards towards the light of a springtime sun, breaking through the relics of their winter prison. Soon the tree is in the glory of its leafy splendour. It is a seasonal marvel, this renewal of spring, when all that seemed dead becomes alive before our wondering eyes. What has happened? There has come about a revival of the old tree.

It is the same in the spiritual realm. Revival, primarily, is the renewal of life in something that has already possessed life. It is impossible to revive

something that has never been alive. But there is one important difference—the dying of the summer life of the tree is due to natural causes, and the same causes bring about the springtime awakening. Spiritual death, on the other hand, is due to the disease of sin.

The best definition of “revival” is the phrase: “Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.”

Beginning then with the understanding that a revival is an awakening among Christian people, let us study the conditions under which revival is given. The prayer of the Psalmist, “Wilt *Thou* not revive us again?” teaches us that God is the source of revival.

It is easy to make the Bible our text-book in this study, for it abounds in examples of revival. In the Old Testament, one of the best studies is found in the story of the revival at Mizpeh.

The antecedents of the story recounted in the first book of Samuel, chapter seven, are important. It is clear that a period of confusion and anarchy was brought about by the spiritual disobedience of God’s people. Point by point, we may compare this state of affairs with the present day—is it not true that spiritual disobedience has caused a great decline to-day?

As a result, defeat came on every hand, and after

that a period of eclipse. The Ark of the Covenant, that sacred possession of the children of Israel, was lost to their bitterest enemies—and, comparing it with to-day, the Ark may be considered as the symbol of the mighty Presence of the Lord. And we know that we have lost such—the glory has departed.

The Ark was returned to the keeping of Kirjath-jearim. “And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.”

The fact that it seemed a long time to wait, and the fact that all the people of God lamented after the Lord, is one of the negative encouragements. They had come to the end of themselves: they were in despair.

Look around our own country to-day. Christians know well that a dozen years have passed since any great demonstration of the power of God. The time is long, and the people are lamenting.

I say again, it is encouraging. The fact that little prayer groups of saints are lamenting after better things and praying in the agony of despair for revival, is surely an encouragement. The tide has turned.

Satan never persuades folks to pray for a revival. The prayer itself is born in the Will of God. God wants to revive us. And, knowing His Will, des-

pairing of ourselves, we are thrown back upon God. "Revive Thy work, O Lord, in the midst of the years——"

It is at that stage we come across the intervention of God by the mouth of His servant. It seems as if God said: "I want to give you revival even more than you desire to have it; but you must pay a price." So it is with us.

"And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, *If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.*"

"If——" God's blessing is conditional upon our wholehearted desire. "If you really want revival, here are My conditions."

"Put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you." To-day we no longer worship idols of wood and stone, but just as much as ever before, we sin against the Lord by enshrining in our hearts idols of our own making. Strange gods—the gods of the outside world. No matter what it may be—if we follow the world in worshipping gold, it is our gold. If we fall away from wholehearted service to God, we generally put something else there. Who or what is the Usurper in your heart? Sin, greed, anything? Any strange god has got to go.

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.

Ashtoreth or Ashtaroth is called the "abomination of the Zidonians." Its worship was the worship of the flesh. God's people must get rid of all that taint.

"Prepare your hearts unto the Lord." We prepare our hearts unto the Lord by seeking His will, and then accepting it. Supposing I were to say to you, just before a meeting in which we expected the blessing of God, "I must go and prepare my heart unto the Lord!" What would you imagine—that I had gone to a dance? No, rather you would expect to find me on my knees seeking God's will by prayer and by reading His written Word. That is the preparation of heart that we all need to-day—first a revival of Bible study and prayer. You cannot reap without first sowing.

"And serve Him only."

An Irish friend once said to me: "If Christians served their earthly employers with the same carelessness and incompetence, they would all have got the sack long ago." We tremble to think of our wobbly sense of duty, or our utterly hopeless perspective.

The other day I was talking to a minister about proposed revival work. He was not concerned about the need of Christians to be revived: neither

was he much worried about the state of the ungodly out of Christ. All that he seemed to care about was that no one should trespass on what one might describe as purely denominational interests. We can thank God for the testimony of denominations, but we must also say that a minister's first duty is to serve God, and all other things are secondary.

When the Christians concentrate on revival with the same zeal that firemen tackle a blazing house: when they serve the Lord with brain and brawn, straining every nerve: then and only then will they be rewarded with the desire of every spiritual heart—revival.

"And he shall deliver you——" God's promises are clear. If we take one of them—"Prove Me now, saith the Lord, if I will not open you the windows of Heaven——" we can rejoice in the definite promise made so that there is no room for doubt, no place for misunderstanding.

In the case of the Israelites, we read next of their obedience. They put away the strange gods and served the Lord only. In so many words, they did what they were told and they did what they knew to be right.

"Obedience, faith and prayer," wrote my friend, Dr. Horace Philp, "are still the only human factors that can bring about revival."

After the people of God had turned away from

their idols, Samuel made the way clear before them. "Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord."

We recall that Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord, and cried: "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." *He prevailed.* In consequence, his name was changed from Jacob, the supplanter, to Israel, a prevailer with God. We know also that Mizpeh means the "place of watchfulness"—and it was the rallying place of the tribes.

Let us read this verse, the declaration of Samuel, very literally: "Gather all the prevailers with God to the place of watchfulness, and then prayer will be fruitful."

Prayer will bring revival. But it must also be united prayer. Dr. A. T. Pierson, the noted Church historian and missionary statesman, has said: "There has never been a revival in any country that has not begun in united prayer, and no revival has ever continued beyond the duration of those prayer meetings." The idea of praying for revival in one section of the Church only is both ludicrous and profitless. We must pray unitedly for the whole household of faith.

"When God intends great mercy for His people," said Matthew Henry, "He first of all sets them a-praying." But prayer must be real prayer. One may say truthfully that much that goes under the name

of prayer is nothing more than hot air, and it rises no higher than the roof.

I have heard people preach against each other in prayer. They quote poetry to the Lord: they tell Him unnecessary and superfluous things: they use high-falutin' language to the Almighty, as if it were an illuminated address instead of the cry of a child to its Father. Prayer is greatly abused by both ignorant and learned.

During an intense, though limited, local revival in the Donegall Road City Mission, Belfast, the power-house of the movement was undoubtedly the early morning prayer meeting arranged by Mr. William Brice, a man after God's own heart.

At six o'clock in the morning, forty of us would be on our knees—and this went on for six months. The type of praying there was not eloquent in style. Instead of that, there was brief and pointed petitions in the crudest vernacular.

One morning, however, there came into our midst a young man, who, alas, had big ideas of his knowledge of the Scriptures. He determined to show all around, including the Almighty, what a profound Bible-student he was. He began by praying that God would triumph in the meeting . . . that He would work His purposes out. . . . Quite a helpful thought! But not content with that, he began to explain to the Lord how to do it. He quoted the

case of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Next he flitted to Enoch. Then he dwelt volubly upon Noah. Next came a sermonette on Abraham's obedience. Then followed a wealth of reflection about Isaac . . . and Jacob . . . and Joseph.

The people had not got up out of their beds at 5.30 a.m. to listen in a cramped position to sermons. They kept shifting position. They lost interest. The prayer meeting was being killed.

I wondered what Brice would do. He had once said to me: "Y'know, when a man prays for three minutes, you pray *with* him. When he prays for another three minutes, you pray *for* him. And if he prays for another three minutes, you pray *against* him."

The learned and voluble brother had been praying for twenty-three minutes. Suddenly Brice roared out:

"Open your eyes, man—you're preachin'."

The prayer died away, and we all thanked God. The man was tomfooling, not praying.

Prayer will bring revival, and if ever you hear of an intensive prayer meeting, take it as a sure sign of blessing to follow.

The people of God hearkened to the advice of Samuel. They meant business. They prepared. They fasted. And they said there: "We have sinned against the Lord."

True searching of heart follows the seeking of God's presence in prayer, and it invariably produces conviction of sin. They confessed their sin. I cannot imagine from the Bible narrative that these tens of thousands recited the words together: "We have sinned against the Lord." No: rather it must mean that they individually and collectively confessed their sins to God and sought His pardon.

It is the same to-day. Revival is impossible apart from confession of sin among believers. It must be confession to God, and it may be confession to one another. Every hindrance must go. Sin must be confessed in order that it may be cleansed. It is noticeable that Samuel "judged" Israel in Mizpeh. Judgment must begin at the house of the Lord.

The result of prayer and confession was a mighty revival and a glorious victory over the powers of evil.

We have lessons to learn from the story of the revival in Samuel's day. The conditions of revival remain unchanged. When we, as Christians, are willing to turn away from our idols, and to prepare by united prayer for widespread blessing, then the Spirit of the Lord will convict us of our sins against God, and with the confession and cleansing of these will come a lasting revival of true religion.

God grant it.

CHAPTER V

UNREALISED HANDICAPS

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way: and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." Jonah iii. 10 and iv. 1.

CHAPTER V

UNREALISED HANDICAPS

We were sitting in easy chairs one day, happily engaged in discussing the subject uppermost in our minds and deepest in our hearts—revival.

Evan Roberts leant forward, his lips shaped into that half-smile which illuminates his countenance every time he makes a profound utterance.

"Once upon a time, my brother," said he, "there was a great revival which entirely swept a mighty metropolis. God visited the city in mighty power, and the revival went down in history as one of the most remarkable of all time. Our Lord referred to it.

"But," he went on, "in spite of the rejoicing in that city, there was *only one man* in that whole city who did not approve of the revival! Only one, so far as we know. And that was the revivalist himself!"

Nineveh provides a remarkable instance of the repentance of God. God does change His mind sometimes—that is, in so far as the English expression "to change the mind" and the very

human idea behind it, can describe the workings of Infinite Majesty. God repented at Nineveh, but His repentance was conditional. He repented only after the Ninevites had themselves repented.

The repentance of God is a mysterious thing. One cannot explain it, but one is not ashamed because the explanation is elusive. The repentance of God is an unfathomable mystery when examined from a finite point of view. But the fact of God's repentance remains, and it becomes an accepted fact. God said that He would destroy the city, and He did it not.

Valuable lessons accrue from a study of the record of this revival, and weighing up our findings bring us great profit.

"And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise and go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried and said, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God. . . ."

We have quoted enough to notice several things of importance. It was *the Lord* who commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh. *The Lord* bade Jonah what "preaching" to preach. Jonah proceeded

to Nineveh according to the word of *the Lord*. And the people believed *God*.

It was not his own counsel that Jonah declared, nor was he compelled to invent a message. *All* that Jonah said was *all* that God commanded him to speak. The Lord took all the responsibility.

And what happened? A mighty revival followed the preaching of Jonah. The people repented, and blessing overtook them instead of catastrophe. The prophet witnessed a great work of grace, a work in which he would be the honoured human instrument, the mouthpiece of God.

He had every reason to be thankful. "A greater than Jonas" did not see the same results and outward success in certain other cities many centuries later. We are all quite sure that He faithfully delivered the message of Him that sent Him, but no revival followed the preaching of the word in the Galilean towns. "Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, *because they repented not.*"

Nineveh repented . . . result, revival. The cities of Galilee repented not . . . result, no revival. The moral is obvious.

And moreover, when Nineveh repented, the repentance was thorough, for it swept the hearts of one and all . . . from the autocrat on the throne to the proletariat of the streets. The King in

Council decreed a day of national humiliation and prayer . . . "Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

Their repentance was immediate as well as thorough, and "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and *God repented* of the evil that *He* said He would do unto them, and He did it not."

It takes but little imagination to visualise the rejoicing which captured the heart of every citizen as he learned of the cancellation of the sentence against the city. Repentance, reform and prayer would be followed by righteousness, rejoicing and prayer.

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry."

What? The revivalist annoyed? Not only annoyed, but very angry. Is it possible? Yes, he was in a very bitter mood. But wasn't Nineveh the queen city the world's metropolis: and wasn't this the most remarkable revival of many decades? True, but the fact remains. Jonah was angry.

Can you picture Charles Finney losing his temper when the people of Rochester, in New York State,

repented at his preaching, beginning a revival movement which swept one hundred thousand souls into the churches as believers?

Can you imagine the praying men of Kells going off in a huff when revival swept the North of Ireland in 1859?

Never.

Then what was that made Jonah so very angry.

Many reasons are offered us. Jonah, says so-and-so, was a Hebrew patriot and he did not want to see Nineveh the oppressor, the hated Gentile city, spared the punishment which it deserved. Jonah, says somebody else, was a prophet of considerable reputation, and he did not want his predictions nullified, for thereby he would lose face.

We can sum up our opinions in a sentence or so.

Jonah had preconceived prejudices about God and His methods, and he wanted the Almighty to conform to his ideas of what was proper and fitting. Jonah thought he knew better than his Master.

An author must be careful about his choice of words before allowing his pronouncements to get into print. The following statement is, therefore, well weighed-up and considered.

Many Jonahs exist to-day among the very best of Evangelical leaders, and, in my opinion, these preconceived notions and prejudices among Evangelicals constitute a far greater hindrance to revival than all the froth preached by the most blatant liberals whom these very Evangelicals condemn so heartily.

Think! Neither heretics, nor agnostics, nor atheists, nor apostates can prevent the coming of a revival if the true Church of God is seeking and prepared. There is a revival going on in Russia to-day and all the might of the Kremlin cannot stop it.

Let us look within our own camp for the hindrance to revival.

CHAPTER VI

THE PARALYSIS OF PREJUDICE

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Prov. xxviii. 13.

CHAPTER VI

THE PARALYSIS OF PREJUDICE

LET us look within our own camp for the hindrances.

It is about time we ceased misplacing the blame, and take on the responsibility ourselves. There were apostates, worldlings, and liberals galore at the time of the great Evangelical revival under Whitefield and Wesley. The true Christians were a tiny minority. But God found some people who did not care two hoots about exchanging their notion of things for His way. The result was revival. And to-day, if the strong minority of true believers would fling their prejudices to the winds, God would take and use their endeavours.

There are plenty of popular and pious prejudices to paralyse the proper preparation for the out-pouring of Pentecostal power. And it is these pernicious perversions of perspective that perpetually prevent the possibility of revival being realised.

It is a mentally exhausting task to try and catalogue the main prejudices and preconceived notions. Some are concerned with methods. Some deal with matters of conduct. Some are doctrinal.

Others are speculative. A goodly number defy classification.

Certain outstanding notions are patent. Fear of open confession; fear of emotional display and unusual manifestations; fear of extremes of doctrine; interpretations of Scripture which paralyse faith; practices which hinder the working of the Spirit.

Take, for instance, fear of open confession. One must walk carefully over such dangerous ground. A certain movement, with which I have no connection, has greatly stressed a certain mode of confession described by its advocates as Sharing. The most conservative of fundamentalists must admit that *certain* aspects of Sharing are nothing more than sharing testimony of God's goodness and spiritual experience. Nobody can grumble at that, for such sharing is a feature of multitudes of fellowship meetings in the most orthodox circles. Wherever Sharing is confined to the exchanging of testimonies of Christian experience, it is helpful and worthy of encouragement.

But Sharing does not stop there. Its advocates generally encourage detailed confession of sin. Some leaders, I know, draw the line somewhere, but others don't. Personally, I have always been most critical of this indiscriminate and detailed confession of sin. To my mind, it is far from

edifying for a young man to describe to a mixed company his secret impurity, or similarly for some to ventilate their marital problems in public.¹

No. This kind of Sharing is generally harmful. I am always ready, as a servant of God, to advise people on even the most intimate things, wherever my knowledge of Scripture or Christian experience enables me to offer a humble opinion. But I would be the first to protest against a public washing of dirty linen.

The late Dr. Jonathan Goforth, with whom I had delightful fellowship in Toronto in 1936, stated his opinion:

"We have a strong feeling that sins committed before conversion are under the blood of God's Holy Son, and never should be confessed. To do so is to bring dishonour upon His Calvary sacrifice."

But, but, but . . .

There is another side to the question. There is such a thing as a Scriptural form of confession. And it is terribly neglected. Much as one protests against the un wisdom of indiscriminate confession, one protests more against the neglect of confession by most Christian people. In their justified prejudice against the harmful features of Sharing, many

¹ Said a South African minister to me: "I was greatly blessed by the first beginnings of the movement in this country. But afterwards, day after day, I found that I was learning too much about the sex problems of individual Christians in the city. It did me harm."

people work up a smoke-screen to hide things that should be exposed and dealt with openly by the Spirit of God.

In revivals recorded in the Old Testament and the New, and all down Church history, open confession of sin has been the usual prelude to blessing. And when we realise the significance of Dr. D. M. McIntyre's comment: "*Revival is the reception by the Church of life abundant*," we realise the importance of this feature of revival.

"Away back in the Levitical law, specific confession was urged—'He shall confess that he has sinned in that thing' (Lev. v. 5). Joshua told Achan: 'Make confession unto Him: but tell me what thou hast done; hide it not from me' (Josh. vii. 19). Until the hindrance to blessing was openly confessed, defeat was inevitable: so it is with the Church.

"But some say: Why open confession for Christians? Is it not sufficient to get down on your knees to admit your error *in secret*? To which I reply, No. Almost every young man who admitted secret sin told me that he had confessed in secret and sinned again until he was ashamed. There has to be *forsaking* as well as confessing sin. Prov. xxviii. 13 states that 'he that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.' When a man says at a prayer meeting, 'I am guilty of criticism of my brethren in the church'—he does not readily fall into the same sin again. It is a sin forsaken as well as confessed.

"Turning to the Acts of the Apostles, we find that in the Revival at Ephesus, 'Many also of those that believed came confessing without reserve their practices'

(Weymouth, Acts xix. 18). One other verse among many is James v. 16: 'Confess your faults (sins) one to another, and pray for one another that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.'

"There is really nothing unusual about confession during Revival. Finney—a great apostle of Revival—urged it and described it. In the North China revivals under Jonathan Goforth, confession was almost invariably the prelude to blessing. In *Calling to Remembrance* (a book sent me by Mrs. Henry Woods of Atlantic City, whose work I gladly recommend to the prayers of every reader) William Newton Blair, the author of a book describing the great Korean revival, declares: '*We may have our theories of the desirability or undesirability of public confession of sin. I have had mine, but I know that when the Spirit of God falls upon guilty souls, there will be confession, and no power on earth can stop it.*'

"Finney, whose practical experience and sound reasoning make him an authority, humanly unrivalled, on the subject of Revival, stated regarding the conditions of Revival: 'A Revival of Religion may be expected when Christians begin to confess their sins to one another. At other times they confess in a general manner, as if they are only half in earnest. But when there comes an ingenuous breaking down, and a pouring out of the heart in confession of sin, the flood gates will soon burst open, and salvation will flow over the place.'

"The author suggests that this opinion of the man whose preaching at Rochester, New York State, in 1830 resulted in over 100,000 people joining the churches as believers, is surely of value.

"In the Revival meetings in which I have been privileged to witness the mighty power of God falling upon saints and sinners, there have been instances of

public reconciliation of man and wife. Call it embarrassing if you like—but who will condemn a separated man and wife for embracing when the love of God has melted them? I have seen a church deacon confess criticism of his minister—embarrassing?—yes but constrained by the Holy Ghost. I have known of letters of apology being written—unusual? Surely. But who has the right to forbid such open confession. It is very dangerous to begin criticising the work of the Spirit.”¹

Last year I attended a great Convention which has been a blessing to my own soul as well as to multitudes. Great emphasis was given to the news of revival on African mission fields, and certain missionaries were asked to describe it. I had a talk with one of these men who had participated in such revival. He had already become my friend through the printed page, and we were one in outlook and ideas.

“Tell me,” said I, “was there much open confession of sin in these revivals in each place?”

“An amazing amount,” he replied, “and there was confession of all sorts of things.”

“And do you find Christians in the home country really understanding what you have seen?”

“Well,” said he, “they seem to think that we must be Oxford Groupers, which we are not. They don’t seem to realise what we mean by spontaneous and open confession in revival.”

¹ *All Your Need*, pp. 119-20.

I knew well how he felt.

“Tell me,” I went on, “you have been greatly encouraged here by the reception given you as a bearer of revival tidings. What do you think would happen if similar confession were to break out in this Convention?”

He shrugged his shoulders very expressively.

“I’m afraid, Orr,” said he, “it wouldn’t go down very well.”

I finished his thoughts for him.

“It wouldn’t be allowed.”

“Yes. I have already thought it over. They have been rejoicing over the news of revival on the Field, but if it came here, they would be shocked beyond words.”

And yet most Conventions, besides helping multitudes of individuals, have been urging preparation for revival upon their adherents, year after year. Oft times, revival has appeared to be on the point of breaking out, but little or nothing happened. In the opinion of many besides myself, fear of unusual emotion and fear of open confession have been the chief hindrances which have frustrated the Divine plan.

Conventions will continue to do a great work for God, but the prayer for revival will remain unanswered until the men in control are prepared to risk setting aside their obvious policy of undue

restraint. Fear of what might happen should be replaced by faith in what will happen if the matter be left in God's hands.

Dr. A. T. Schofield, in a preface to *Revival in India* (by Miss Dwyer), wrote in this connection :

"One thing to be borne in mind is that since the days of Pentecost there is no record of the sudden and direct work of the Spirit of God upon the souls of men that has not been accompanied by events more or less abnormal. It is, indeed, on consideration, only natural that it should be so. We cannot expect an abnormal inrush of Divine light and power, so profoundly affecting the emotions and changing the lives of men, without remarkable results. As well expect a hurricane, an earthquake, or a flood, to leave nothing abnormal in its course, as to expect a true Revival that is not accompanied by events quite out of our ordinary experience."

I noticed recently in that excellent and orthodox paper, *The Inter-Varsity Magazine*, a trenchant article by Howard Guinness, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. His recent visit to the South African Universities has been the means under God of spiritual awakening among students. Here are the paragraphs which caught my eye :

"Deep repentance is a very costly thing, and we shy at it. At Keswick Convention this year, missionaries from the foreign field, in describing some of the revivals they had witnessed and in which they had taken part, said with almost monotonous regularity that these had

started when people commenced to confess their sins publicly and then put things really right with their neighbours, where possible, as well as with God. What ! Publicly ? In this country, if such a thing were to start in some of our 'orthodox' circles, the meeting would hastily be closed down, and it would be said that the devil had got in ! Some of us are enslaved by fear at this very moment about this very thing, and until this sin of fear is confessed and cleansed away in the precious blood of Christ, no revival is possible. Our supposed 'orthodoxy' here does not happen to be the orthodoxy of the Holy Ghost in the word of God."

Dr. Guinness's declaration is borne out by present happenings. Andrew Gih, the Chinese revivalist, refers¹ to this "confession" in describing work in China :

"In one meeting conviction for sin came powerfully on the people, and one after another confessed their sins and their need for prayers simultaneously, and the presence of God was near, and the people were blessed and souls were saved."

¹ *Twice Born—And then ?* p. 42.

CHAPTER VII

THE PARALYSIS OF PREJUDICE (CONTINUED)

"So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people." Ezra iii. 13.

CHAPTER VII

THE PARALYSIS OF PREJUDICE (CONTINUED)

FEAR of emotional display is a widespread complex. Within a week, I heard four preachers,¹ representing as many denominations, declare their same conviction, in varying words:

"We are willing and eager for revival. But we must be quick to crush every appearance of emotional feeling, lest we be led astray."

Sheer humbug, said I. There has never been a revival of religion unaccompanied by display of emotion of some sort. In their fear of the ridicule of the world, Evangelical leaders are watchfully prepared to prevent anything unusual in the way of a breakdown.

Let me make myself quite clear.

I know of, and most heartily condemn, evangelists who base their appeal on the emotional side of men's (or more generally women's) nature. The resultant decision is purely emotional, seldom permanent, and brings discredit on the preaching of the gospel. Instances are not hard to recall. A

¹Incidentally, these four preachers made their declarations in the over-missioned North of Ireland, in my home country. And there, in all my life, I have never seen even one tenth of any congregation moved to tears. I question if they have either. It is an almost unjustified bogey which suits the Devil's purpose down to the ground. The first sign of revival in Gospel(?)—hardened Ulster will be genuine and open display of sorrow for sin—weeping!

preacher, with tears in his eyes, tells a congregation a pathetic story which has been told so often and varied so much that it can no longer be considered true. But it serves its purpose. It brings a lump into many a motherly throat and it makes young fellows bite their lips. Before they know what has happened, they have signed a decision card. And then people wonder why there are backsliders. Half the so-called backsliders are not backsliders at all. They are forward-sliders, for they were made to slide forward into a position which ought only to be reached by a step of faith. It is far better to make no appeal than to make an appeal based only on emotion.

An appeal must be threefold to be effective. It must reach the intellect. It must touch the conscience. And it must stir the emotions. If the heart is stirred apart from conviction of sin or convincing reason, the result is fruitless in most cases.

But while appeal to both intellect and conscience is essential, the stirring of the emotions must not be prevented. A man, for example, seldom sins in a cool deliberate way with his brain. He more often sins through his passions, his hot desires, and his emotional cravings. And when sin is dealt with, expect a reaction in those very things.

If a hardened old rascal yields his stubborn will to God, let him weep, let him sob, let him cry aloud. It may be the first time for years. Weeping is a good

sign, provided it has been preceded by conviction of sin. If you can thank God for the convincing of a man's mind, for conviction of a guilty conscience—thank Him also for broken-up emotions.

And if five hundred hardened hearts are melted at once, expect to be upset yourself at this unusual experience. It was once my privilege to see a great meeting in which the majority were weeping in tearful penitence before God, and all that I could do was to weep with them. The Spirit of God had been mightily at work beforehand.

My dear friend, Andrew Gih, of Shanghai, when speaking by interpretation in Canton, saw something similar:

"Soon the whole congregation was weeping before God, until even my interpreter began to weep, and could not interpret for me; so we had to turn the whole service into a prayer meeting. All went down on their knees weeping and crying to God. It was deep conviction for sin."

Don't be afraid of emotion. The Spirit of God Who convinces the minds of men and convicts them of sin, is able to restrain their emotional reaction, if such restraint be at all necessary.

If you go round to console a friend whose father has been killed in a tragic motor-smash, and you find your friend crying aloud, do you upbraid? Do you say, "I don't approve of all this emotionalism?"

You ought to know that a good cry is a safety-valve of relief for the pent-up feelings of a wounded heart.

The same applies to sorrow for sin.

A letter, quoted by Dr. Jonathan Goforth, written by a missionary witnessing the North China Revival of 1908, states :

"Hitherto I have had a horror of hysterics and emotionalism in religion, and the first outbursts of grief from some men who prayed, displeased me exceedingly. I didn't know what was behind it all. Eventually, however, it became quite clear that nothing but the mighty Spirit of God was working in the hearts of men."

In my own experience, every time that I have seen an unusual amount of brokenness in a meeting, I knew that it had *in fact* been preceded by heart-searching of the mighty power of God. Similarly, every time that I have seen unusual rejoicing among believers, it has been as a sequel to a great work of grace.

Joy, too, is an emotion, and some folks are afraid of it. Why should they be?

Years ago I attended an International football match. Around me were staid lawyers with steady equilibrium, doctors with calm philosophy, grocers' assistants with phlegmatic indifference, sardonic navvies chewing tobacco, as well as excitable students and nervy adolescents. Half-way through, a mighty shout rent the air and hundreds of hats went up to the sky—why? Because a gentleman

dressed in a minimum of clothing had succeeded in propelling an inflated ball of leather between two upright pieces of wood. How emotional. Psychologists ought to pour their scientific contempt upon doctors and lawyers and grocers' assistants who took part in such an unseemly display of emotion! But they don't. They confine their sarcasm to the results of something which they don't like—religion—something which is a perpetual challenge to them.

Nobody worries about the shouting and joy and extravagance at a boxing tournament. But if a guilty soul gets the joy of deliverance from the curse of sin, and shouts "Hallelujah," the Church people try to congeal his blood with a freezing look.

The report of the Irish Presbyterian Church, "Revival in Manchuria," illuminates this very subject :

"Perhaps you say it's a sort of religious hysteria. So did some of us when we first heard of the Revival. But here we are, about sixty Scottish and Irish Presbyterians who have seen it—all shades of temperament—and, much as many of us shrank from it at first, every one who has seen and heard what we have, every day last week, it is certain there is only *one* explanation—that it is God's Holy Spirit manifesting Himself in a way we never dreamed of. We have no right to criticise; we dare not. One clause of the Creed that lives before us now in all its inevitable, awful solemnity is, '*I believe in the Holy Ghost.*'"

For myself I can say that I have never been considered demonstrative by nature, and in me is a

decided antipathy for false display of feeling. But I have thoroughly appreciated some unusual sights at different times.

Can you picture a staid evangelistic committee linking arms and dancing for joy? Why? Some hundred people had professed conversion. And that was as excusable as the mafficking on Armistice Night.

Can you picture the oversight of an assembly, belonging to a body of people noted for their solemnity, bursting into handclapping while they triumphantly sang the praises of the Lamb Who had been glorified by a visitation of reviving power?

Memory keeps suggesting illustrations. One young man was so overjoyed when revival visited Ngaruawahia Camp that he went outside the tent and turned somersaults in the grass. Amused, but gently restraining him, I was told that his chums had been saved.

"I don't know, Mr. Orr," he said, "why I should be so exuberant by nature. I'm not Irish, you know."

"No?" said I, passing over a doubtful compliment.

"No! My folks are Old Country folks all right, but they don't come from Ireland. They come from Wales."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Oh, I know. They came from a place called Cork, in Wales."

CHAPTER VIII

THE PARALYSIS OF PREJUDICE (CONCLUDED)

"And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again." Numbers xxii. 34.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PARALYSIS OF PREJUDICE (CONCLUDED)

YET another hindrance to revival is due to the super-abundance of speculative and imaginative preaching described as *prophecy lecturing*.

There are men called of God to the exposition of the prophetic Scriptures. Such teachers have one's best sympathies.

But there are also men who were *once* used of God in evangelism, and have subsequently lost their power of acceptance. They turn to sensational prophetic lectures, and thereby gain a hearing from people who love to speculate on whether Glasgow will be in the new Roman Empire and Aberdeen out of it, the latter being beyond the outermost Roman wall!

Once I saw an article on "The United States in Prophecy." Its title mildly tickled my curiosity, for I had not read any reference to Uncle Sam in the Book. The verse around which all the article revolved was the one referring to a "nation peeled and scattered." It was the author's serious belief that the nation referred to was the great Western Republic. "Scattered" . . . yes, the Americans

were scattered across 3,000 miles of territory. "Peeled" . . . this undoubtedly referred to the prime American characteristic, and that was being clean shaven—in other words, peeled by safety razor blades. And this was a serious book, published by a serious author!

Such prophecy exponents may be pitied. But there are others who are less extravagant but much more dangerous.¹

Any scheme of prophetic teaching which serves to slacken the witness of Christians in this apostate age, or to undermine their faith, or to develop the attitude of pessimistic *laissez-faire* among them,

¹ It is amazing to consider the number of queer ideas people have about this subject. On one occasion, in a city within the State of New York, the author was stressing the need of revival and the hindrances in individual lives. As a result, hearts were being convicted; so, in order to provide an opportunity of clearing up possible difficulties, he suggested that his hearers should ask any questions regarding their peculiar problems. Immediately, a lady rose to her feet, and said:

"But of course, sir, the Scriptures clearly teach that revival is impossible before the coming of the Lord."

It may be said that the patience of the speaker was somewhat tried. But he replied quietly:

"Madam, there is not a single statement of Scripture which might suggest that a Christian living a sub-normal life cannot return to the normal life which is the plane of greater blessing. That is revival, and if it is possible in the life of one believer, it is possible in the lives of multitudes of believers."

"It is true that the Scriptures predict that the end of the age will bring apostasy and unbelief. But this has got nothing whatsoever to do with the body of believers. Moreover, the imminence of the Lord's return makes us all hope for a quickening within the Church, the Body of Christ, to prepare us for His coming. Is there any Scripture in your mind which suggests that we, here in this meeting, cannot experience a reviving straight from God—provided we fulfil the conditions?"

There was no answer.

deserves to be received with suspicion. It has a bad flavour. It is subtly dangerous.

First among these hindrances is the view that, as the Lord's Coming is imminent, revival is impossible.

This is the line of argument.

The Bible, they say, predicts a growing apostasy at the End-time, and it does not say anything about a revival. Therefore, we had better concentrate on the Lord's Return, seeing that there will be no revival.

First of all, the Bible does say many things about revival at the End-time, but their view of things does not permit them to see them.

Secondly, every apostasy has been paralleled by an intensive period of witness. There is no reason to regard the "last of the last days" as an exception. Intensive witness is revival in action, and the results are with God.

Thirdly, if we are to do nothing and build on nothing because time and place are not mentioned in Holy Writ in the connection, the work of God will surely suffer.

China is mentioned in the Bible, but not Madagascar. Should the brave pioneers to the Malagasy people have adopted this attitude?—it does not say that we shall see the island of Madagascar won for Christ, so we had better do nothing! It may be that God does not want us to pioneer the island

this century, and we had better wait for the Millennium.

No. The missionaries would have realised that the general command of the Saviour "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel" covered Madagascar. And Christians to-day should realize that the innumerable general exhortations to revival cover any time and place, so far as the Christian Church is concerned.

The true connection between Revival and the Lord's Coming is the verse:

"And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

Self-purification is revival. And the truest preparation for the Advent of Christ, is to preach revival to the Church and salvation to the lost.

"I have little sympathy with the type of Christian who declares that a Revival is impossible before the Lord comes. Not only has he no scriptural warrant for such a statement, but he is making a poor excuse for his own lack of spiritual progress. As a matter of fact, I will say that the man who is not praying for Revival is not right with God.

"It is quite true that the Scriptures predict apostasy in the last days. It is quite true that many shall fall away. It is quite true that there will be little faith left on the earth when the Lord comes. But what has that to do with the believer himself, or his relationship with his Master? If Revival is possible in one heart to-day, it

is possible in every heart belonging to God. Revival comes from God the Holy Ghost. He is still able and willing to give refreshing so that the name of Christ might be magnified. The study of the past convinces me that every period of apostasy has been paralleled by a period of intense witness. The purpose of Revival to-day is to prepare Christians for the witness which must be given to this dying world.

"The Lord is coming soon, and my heartfelt prayer is 'Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!'" But is the Church—the Body which will soon be united to the Head—ready for His Coming? Is our present diseased state a credit to us? Never. We ought to be ashamed to think that Christ may come and find us so bankrupt of spiritual life. The truest preparation for the coming of Christ is a quickening in the Body of Christ. The believer who is not earnestly praying for such a Revival ought to, and will be, ashamed of himself.

"But where in Scripture do you find any prediction of Revival before the Lord's Coming?" they say. There are many. But I will quote one passage again. "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the Coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain."

"Most students are agreed that the husbandman typifies Christ, that the precious fruit of the earth is the harvest of souls, and that the early rain is Pentecost. But when one suggests that the latter rain will be a Revival before the Lord's Coming, objections are heard—"It refers to the Jews."

"This latter cry is heard too often nowadays. It reminds me of the policeman in Sydney who found a dead horse in Castlereagh-street. As he could not spell Castlereagh he pulled the carcass into King-street and

put King-street in his report ! Quite a number of people, finding in a verse an obstacle to their pet theories, immediately cry, 'It refers to the Jews.' And so we find that a number of people declare that the latter rain will be upon the Jews after the Church is taken away. It baffles me to think that they inconsistently declare that the Church and the Holy Spirit will be taken away, and yet a Revival will go on.

"There has never been a Revival apart from the Holy Spirit : neither has there been a Revival apart from the Church. For example, assuming that there is no Church in Nepal, is it not taken for granted that Revival is impossible there ? Without believers there can be no Revival. Revival concerns believers only. How then will 'the latter rain' be a Revival among the Jews ? No, the early rain of Pentecost was outpoured upon the Church : and the latter rain will likewise be upon the Church. We may expect a sudden great awakening, a period of intense witness, followed by the ingathering of souls to complete the Body of Christ—and then the Blessed Hope.

"One finds that the pessimists fulfil their own ideas in themselves. As soon as a man starts talking about the impossibility of Revival, his own work is beginning to shrivel up. The man who believes in Revival is the man who sees results.

"'But,' says someone, 'why is it that God does not hear our prayers for Revival ?' Because of your inconsistency, I must reply. The majority of my readers have sung for years the hymn

"Showers of blessing,
Showers of blessing we need,
Mercy drops round us are falling,
But for the showers we plead."¹

¹ *All Your Needs*, pp. 122-23.

Established practice of Christian organisations and individuals often prevents the Holy Spirit from using the instruments of His choice for public ministry.

We can examine this under several heads.

Where public ministry is *rigidly* confined to a trained and ordained ministry, revival seems impossible. There have been revivals of great power among people belonging to Church systems which refuse public ministry to their "laity"—but these revivals have come when the powers-that-be set aside their notions for the time being. For instance, Haslam, the great Cornish revivalist, was a rigid cleric ; but when revival followed his conversion, he allowed the instruments of God's choice to share his ministry. If the rules of a church or society restrict the Holy Spirit in His choice of mouth-pieces, then revival will come only according to the degree of abandonment of the code. Knowing and appreciating the work of Evangelical clergy in the Church of England, I can say from experience that the spiritual life of an Evangelical Parish depends upon the open fellowship meeting, or the home mission, or Christian Endeavour, or upon the prayer meeting—any place where the vicar and people share the ministry.

Let no one misunderstand the position of the writer. I believe with all my heart in the value of a

trained ministry, providing that the training is based on Bible study. I believe that a man obviously called of God to evangelistic, pastoral, or teaching ministry should give his whole time to the work, unless support is not forthcoming. But having said that, I must declare my belief that in every group of Christians there is sufficient *local* talent for the carrying on of the ministry. If public ministry of the Word, or public prayer, is confined to one or two men, much talent goes to waste, many saints suffer paralysis, and the purpose of the Spirit is generally frustrated. One agrees, on the other hand, that there are many abuses in a meeting where any Tom, Dick or Harry is free to blather nonsense. But there are many more evils connected with the assembly where neither Tom, Dick nor Harry is free to be the mouthpiece of the Lord.

An appeal to the history of all recent revivals confirms this. When the power of the Holy Spirit fell upon the Church, the rank and file were privileged much more than in ordinary times. The trained ministry was mightily used, but sometimes the trained man had to stand aside and see the Holy Spirit take and use the nobody.

In North America, the continent of liberty, there is a different type of snare in this matter. In very many "open" churches, the ministry is carried

on entirely by importations, with the pastor acting as a sort of chairman. This system has its good points, for a large congregation is attracted and fed on cream, week by week. But its weaknesses are obvious. First, local talent is stifled. If a young man in Tennessee wants to have opportunity, he goes to Oregon, where the people will hear him gladly—seeing that he is not one of themselves. Second, the system of imported ministry tends to make sermon-tasters out of folks who could be well-employed in local preaching. It is grand to get people "too busy to criticise!"

Again, among assemblies of people who boast of their liberty in ministry, there is often a hindrance. The Scriptures undoubtedly teach certain limitations on the ministry of women, and it is certainly grieving to see women taking positions which were never meant for them. But if, as the Scriptures seem to suggest, women are permitted to pray and prophesy, it is obvious that the restrictions placed upon women's ministry by certain authorities are far beyond New Testament order.

Praying and prophesying women are a feature of almost all revivals of Divine power. One remembers being in a meeting of Christians where the voice of women was never heard in prayer. Revival spread from a neighbouring place, and when it did, women prayed, and nobody said no. It was

90 THE CHURCH MUST FIRST REPENT
so obviously of the Spirit of God that the prejudice
was discarded for the time being.

God must have freedom to answer our prayers
in His own way. The revival that we pray for will
be very different to the usual run of Christian
activity as we find it to-day. That supposition ought
to convince us that the coming revival will be a
most unusual manifestation of God's power. If
we are going to crush everything unusual, because
we cannot understand it, then we are going to
choke the revival at its birth. Fear of emotion,
fear of open confession, and other fears and com-
plexes, have got to be reconsidered, and abandoned.

Otherwise, when revival comes, we may find our-
selves in the minority of exceedingly-displeased
and very angry prophets who know how to manage
the work better than God Himself, Who stooped
to entrust us with the message.

CHAPTER IX

DESTRUCTIVE MINISTRY ALSO IS NECESSARY

"See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." Jeremiah i. 10

CHAPTER IX

DESTRUCTIVE MINISTRY ALSO IS NECESSARY

To the preacher who is very much concerned about effectiveness in his type of message, the Prophecy of Jeremiah is a mine of help.

Some preachers are definitely called to a pastoral kind of preaching. They are adepts in delivering a sermon calculated to bring comfort to the bereaved. They know how to put together addresses for the saints. They talk interestingly to children. They are marvellously effective in their sphere—pastoral care of the Church. God's blessing rests upon them. The Church could never get on without them. They are beloved of the people.

But these men, already used of God, are often envious of other preachers who gain evangelistic success. They try hard to obtain the same results themselves, but, try as they will, they cannot set the Thames on fire. They get discouraged.

Now the first thing that a preacher has to consider is—"what is my sphere?" Think of the busy world. How does it get on? Not every electrician is a good gardener. Nor is every farmer a good dentist. Sometimes a man combines two spheres

of usefulness in his business and his hobby. But the so-called Jack of all trades is unusual, save when we limit its meaning to a handyman's activities. The world gets on by specialists—those who master their job and are thoroughly effective in it. So also with the work of God. We are all members of one another. One member cannot do without the other.

If you feel that God has given you the precious gift of making a church, full of varied temperaments, thoroughly harmonious, don't despise that gift of God. Your spiritual children will, in future years, rise up to call you blessed. God may not intend you to be a revivalist.

But if you feel called to be a revivalist, a man who specialises in the work of curing Church decline, remember that pastoral methods will not always be successful. Something more drastic is required.

Just as in medical practice. A dietician can help a man's digestion and benefit more than his stomach thereby. But in cases of pneumonia, better call in a physician.

Methods are certainly important. And if you are really trying to be an effective revivalist, I counsel you to consider your methods. Some iconoclasm is necessary.

The first thing that we notice about the call of Jeremiah, is his extreme youthfulness. When God called him, he cried in his great distress: "Ah, Lord God! behold I cannot speak: for I am a child."¹

It is remarkable to find how many revivalists were really young when they were called to be God's mouthpiece in a special way. We think of the disciples, young men, contrary to popular belief based on Italian art. We think of the judges and prophets—Gideon and Samuel, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and many more. We know of Wesley, and Spurgeon, and Moody, and Finney, and Booth, and Hudson Taylor, and Judson, and a host of modern and recent examples.

Why are God's special instruments young, as a rule, and not old as in the known exceptions? Probably the answer is to be found in the fact that young men are more malleable than old. Most people are converted when young, and the Lord loves to get His man before backsliding or prejudice can spoil him.

The fact remains. And God overruled Jeremiah's objections, saying "Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee. Then the Lord touched my mouth. And the

¹ Jer. i, 6.

Lord said unto me, Behold I have put *my* words in thy mouth. . . ."¹

Then follows a thought-provoking form of commission:

"See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant."²

Of this six-fold commission, four injunctions are destructive: and only the latter two are constructive.

"To build and to plant"—surely a great work. But it had to be preceded by a rooting-out and a pulling-down, destruction and demolishing.

Surely this sounds drastic! But it was very necessary, as the historical background shows. The Jewish kingdom had become overgrown with weeds, overbuilt with traditional superstructures. They had to go first. Some iconoclasm was necessary. Some destruction was required.

Let us look in the garden for a parable.

We walked round a beautiful garden which occupied a former piece of waste land. The gardener showed us round.

"Those are beautiful roses," we said to him.

"I planted them," replied the gardener, with justified pride.

¹ Jer. i. 7-8-9.

² Jer. i. 10.

"What a beautifully-cut hedge!" we remarked next.

"I trimmed that," he said.

"Who is responsible for that lovely Sweet-William border?"

Again the gardener smiled and claimed the credit. And we passed on, thinking to ourselves that this gardener had created a grand testimony to his skill in gardening.

At the garden gate, we found an old fellow watching a smoking heap of refuse.

"What have you been doing?"

"Working at the garden," he said.

"Well, then, what have you to show for your labour?"

"Nothing, Sir," he replied.

"Then you cannot have been working!" we told him.

"Sir," he asserted. "When we came here, this garden was a piece of waste land, overgrown with weeds, full of stones and sand, swampy in one corner, and pretty hopeless all round."

We got interested.

"Well, sir," he went on, "I broke up the land, and I destroyed the weeds, and dug out the stones, and carted away the sand, and it was my job to drain the swampy corner."

We listened with growing appreciation.

"I am saying nothing against the other fellow who planted the garden. He did his job well. But where would his *planting* come in if I hadn't first *rooted out* and *destroyed* the weeds?"

Both men's labour was necessary, but the rooting-out and destruction of weeds preceded the planting of flowers and shrubs.

Again, let us walk around one of London's congested areas. A huge block of up-to-date working-class flats catches our eye. A nicely dressed gentleman offers to show us around and explain things. We are amazed with the modernity of these flats.

"I wonder who built these flats?" we ask.

Our guide smiles.

"As a matter of fact, I'm the building contractor who put every brick and stone in place. I was just looking round."

And his eyes shine with pleasure at our comments.

"Sir," we tell him, "you have raised a monument to your own skill."

"But," he tells us, "I didn't do everything. There was another contractor, and his job was to *pull down* and *throw down* the slums that used to be here. And without his good work of clearing the ground, I could never have built this block of flats here."

And if we are to plant a garden for the Lord, a place of delight abounding in roses of holiness and

love, hedged about by faith in the promises of God, bordered with sweet praise . . .

Or if we are to build a palace for our King, a house of living stones, a place of service and adoration . . .

Let us remember the first work of rooting out the weeds and utterly destroying them.

Let us appreciate the value of slum-clearance.

One of the great weaknesses of many forms of ministry to-day, especially Convention ministry, is the attempt to sow good seed among thorns. The thorns generally continue springing up, and the seed is choked thereby, despite the good intention of the human sower.

Seed sown in a prepared ground requires only the action of the elements to produce fruit in season. Seed sown by the wayside, or in stony places, or among thorns, will have its prospects of life severely threatened almost immediately.

Likewise, changing the mode of illustration, a Christian who is in proper relationship with God is generally hungry for the great truths and affirmations of the Gospel. A constructive message is then not only desirable, but necessary. Good food, the finest of the cream of the wheat of the Gospel of Christ, is eagerly assimilated by the Christian who lives in harmony with God.

But all Christians are not in proper relationship with their Lord. The present obvious dearth of revival is largely due to the fact that the majority of Christians are out of touch with the source of Divine power. And even at Conventions, the first work needed is to get things put right in the lives of those attending.

To give a sick stomach an overdose of cream is to risk indigestion. Even a sick stomach prefers the taste of cream to the flavour of the bitter medicine. But the bitter medicine is necessary, and it does not prevent the enjoying and digesting of good food afterwards—rather it creates the actual appetite of good health, which is quite distinct from the false cravings of indigestion.

For instance, the glorious message of the position of every believer in Christ is a comfort to many souls. But it cannot bring much blessing to a stubborn Christian living in disobedience and conscious sin. He needs to act on the teaching of repentance and confession and cleansing *first*, and then he may comfort himself with other truths.

I heard once of a church which had the cream of doctrine given within its walls, week in, week out. Judging from the quality of upbuilding ministry given there, one would have expected to find the church members on the highest heavenly plane. But in this instance, they had a church quarrel

which resulted in the bread and wine being spilled in a scuffle: and the police were called in to restore order. They obviously needed more than cream. Medicine was wanted badly.

Positional truth cannot be profitably taught until *conditional* teaching has had its effect. Cast no pearls before swine.

So great is this problem, that when the preacher hits out against sin among believers and urges purity of life, critics cry "Introspection" and some insist that he is trying to divert the eyes of the people away from Christ towards self and shortcomings.

It was my happy experience once, to speak at a great Convention well-known in England. It was arranged with the council members that if blessing came through in the degree hoped for, I would be at liberty to continue for double the time. Beginning with destructive ministry, the Lord used His word to create deep conviction of heart. The place was thronged. Christians were stirred to confession and repentance, and many souls were saved. The meetings continued in a larger hall.

By contrast, I was speaking at another Convention, not so far away. It was a Convention of good standing. I felt led to speak first of the shortcoming of believers and the need of getting right before enjoying the good things of the feast. The

next speakers seemed to doubt the worth of such a method, and their message seemed to be: "You are complete in Christ, so don't worry about these trifles. God accepts you in the Beloved, and you needn't mind." For days there was that cross-current of message. I believed with all my heart in the truth of *their* message but I thought that the time was unripe for its application. With a burdened heart, I prayed for clear guidance regarding continuing my message. The Lord put a text, a "new" text for me, into my heart, and I preached it. Before I preached it, a speaker dwelt on the glorious promises of God, promises meant for obedient children. Then followed my opportunity.

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."¹

It gave the connection at last, but we had no great revival. It drove home many truths to me. Let us comfort one another with the grand truths of our position in Christ. But let us not make excuse by saying that our "completeness in Him" permits us to wink at known sin.

It is generally conceded that the great problem of to-day is the lack of the sense of sin among

¹ 2 Corinthians vii. 1.

believers and unbelievers alike. The consequent need must be met. It is a need of a message of strong rebuke first, and upbuilding can follow afterwards.

"See," said the Lord to Jeremiah, "I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, to build and to plant."

Jeremiah's prophecy immediately runs along the line commanded by the Lord. The words put into his mouth enable him to fulfil his six-fold commission.

"Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead."¹

This verse is significant to English-speaking people. When we seek an explanation of God's goodness to the British and American peoples, we must consider the declaration: "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments *to a thousand generations*," and contrast it with "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me." Scarcely an Anglo-Saxon can say that he has had no ancestors who feared God and served Him. Practically every atheist has had a praying great-grand-

¹ Jer. ii. 9.

father or forbear of some sort. And the lives and prayers of generations gone by bring us the blessing of the smile of God upon unborn generations to come.

"Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead."

"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."¹

How true of us to-day.

But people cannot go on for ever in sin without feeling some pangs of conscience.

"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts."²

Backsliders are the most miserable class in the earth. They cannot fully enjoy the pleasures of sin, as the worldling does. They certainly cannot enjoy the things of the Lord. Their joys are transient, and their moods are like the headaches which follow hectic revelry. And yet, backsliders continue to rebel. They persist in their disobedience. They keep up an appearance of religion: and perhaps

¹ Jer. ii. 13.

² Jer. ii. 19.

they will be ardent advocates of one aspect of truth, of peace, or temperance, or social justice, or modesty or even church attendance. They develop a boldness based on an attempt to balance their inferiority complex.

And so Jeremiah makes clear the message of the Lord, the rebuke that cannot be misunderstood. Here it is in modern phrasing:

"That's why the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain: for you have the bold face of a woman of the streets, and you refuse to be ashamed."

And the remedy is likewise made clear.

"Only acknowledge thine iniquity that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God. . . ."

Again it is open confession that is required. Again a broken and a contrite spirit God will not despise. Confession is the first step in penitence. But the people have got to be told that. A faithful Jeremiah is required nowadays. All through the prophet's pleading is the challenge: "God says, that if you do this, He will bless you and restore you; but if you do the other, misery will continue."

We must likewise tell the people: "If you repent and acknowledge your sin, God will send revival; if you don't, He won't send it, and your backslidings will go on." A black-and-white picture is needed. No room should be left for ambiguities

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of expression. "Get right with God" should be the clarion cry.

The great apostle of revival, Charles Grandison Finney, adopted the Jeremiah approach, and preached an unmistakable, faithful message. Perhaps we could say that his favourite verse was:

"Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns!"

"Fallow ground," he wrote, "is ground which has once been tilled, but which now lies waste, and needs to be broken up and mellowed, before it is suited to receive grain. To break up the fallow ground is to break up your hearts, to prepare your minds to bring forth fruit unto God. The mind of man is often compared in the Bible to ground, and the Word of God to seed sown therein, the fruit representing the actions and affections of those who receive it."

His Lectures on Revivals of Religion continues the theme in detail, making self-examination and heart-searching, followed by confession and restitution, the spiritual action which is implied by "breaking up the fallow ground."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, preaching on the same text, declared: "Do you know what happens to a fallow field? All the friable qualities seem to depart, and it hardens as it lies caked and unbroken. And if a man will not sow wheat, he shall have a

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crop for all that, for the weeds will spring up and increase till the fallow field shall become a wilderness of thorns and briars!"

Heart-searching always produces conviction. "General confessions of sin," says Finney, dealing with the results of heart-searching, "will never do. Your sins were committed one by one, and as far as you can come at them, they ought to be reviewed and repented of one by one."

We started to consider the necessity of destructive ministry, and it has led us along the same lines as before—faithful preaching, is followed by heart-searching, heart-searching by repentance and open repentance, repentance by revival.

Destructive ministry is therefore necessary.

*Oh the Lord people ought to search up
his heart to the blessed place - "I find it"
down below, Lord.*
*see this man, was for me
"if my people will be obedient by my voice
I will build them a house & set my face
toward them & will be their Father & they shall be my people
& I will be their Father & they shall be my people."*

CHAPTER X
KEEPERS OF THE VINEYARDS

"They made me the keeper of the vineyards;
but mine own vineyard have I not kept." Song
of Sol. i. 6.

CHAPTER X

KEEPERS OF THE VINEYARDS

Years ago, I was crossing the vast Nullabor Plains of Australia, a barren stretch of land to all intents and purposes a desert.

Late at night I went out for a walk. The glorious night thrilled my heart—stars shone down in myriads. The loneliness was oppressive. I knew that hundreds of miles to the North, right away up to the north coast of Australia, was nothing but desert, without a settlement. Barren desert lay for a long distance to the South, until the great Australian Bight was reached. Many hundred miles eastwards was desert which came within reach of the South Australian towns. Westwards was scrub and desert, Kalgoorlie and the other desert mining towns being the only settlements on the road to Perth. What a barren desert, with stretch after stretch of waterless plain.

"Yes," someone told me, "it's as dry as a bone. But you should see it when the unexpected has happened—after a shower of rain."

Next day, further westward, I did see it after a shower of rain. The welcome water had effected a

remarkable transformation. Wild flowers and grasses had sprung up as if by magic.

What caused it?

Life-giving water.

It is a long way from the barren heart of Australia to Tipperary—about 12,000 miles or so. The contrast is likewise great. For all Ireland as well as Tipperary is verdant green all the year round. Rain is expected on almost every day except the 12th of July. Water is so plentiful that droughts are a great rarity. Abundance of water has made Ireland the greenest land in the world, and it is appropriate to describe Erin as the Emerald Isle.

My colleague, Dr. John McNeill, and I left the rest of our preaching party in the North, and we set off by car to visit Limerick, where we had been asked to speak at meetings in connection with St. Mary's Cathedral.

From Dublin we travelled through beautiful County Wicklow. One place I was eager to visit, and that was the beautiful "Vale of Avoca." This verdant valley has been immortalised in the song of "The Meeting of the Waters." Most people have heard Moore's words:

"There is not in this wide world
A valley so sweet,
As that vale in whose bosom
The bright waters meet."

Two beautiful rivers meet together in this lovely valley. The point where they join is, of course, "the meeting of the waters." It is a far-famed beauty-spot, and we had no difficulty in locating it. There on the one hand was sparkling mountain water, rushing to meet another crystal-clear stream.

The poet Moore planted a tree on the point of the tongue of land at the junction of the rivers. Water all round it, clouds always above it, but the famous tree is withered and dead.

Withered and dead!

Yes, withered and dead at the meeting of the waters.

Somehow or other, the roots are out of touch with the life-giving fluid, and it has died. And the passerby marvels to see a tree withered and dead within a few feet of millions of gallons of water.

Here is a parable for us.

The man who handles the water of life, who stands near the fountain of living water, who sees the stream on either side of him, may be withering and dying himself.

"They made me keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."¹

¹ Song of Solomon.

My late father was a kind-hearted man, and his memory is fresh with us. He kept a jeweller's shop, and made his livelihood chiefly by mending watches and clocks. My grandfather and great-grandfather before him were likewise watchmakers. Perhaps it goes back before that. Cousins of mine are likewise watchmakers, though neither of my brothers have carried on the tradition.

Father spent his time looking after people's clocks.

But there is one outstanding detail in my memory. Father was so busy looking after other people's clocks that most of our own clocks were stopped. . . .

I remember reading in Professor Wrighton's book, *A Philosopher's Love for Christ*, the story of how my dear friend was motoring in the States. The details are not very clear in my mind, but I remember sufficient to recall that the good professor had stopped at a gasoline pump to buy petrol. The garage man wanted more business, so he pointed out that Professor Wrighton's car needed cleaning. My friend was not eager to have it cleaned. But the gatage man persisted, pointing out how much the car needed cleaning.

But Professor Wrighton laughingly told him to go and clean another car across the way.

"That car is worse than mine," he said, in so

many words, "and you ought to clean it. Whose car is it anyway?"

The garage man gave a smile. It was his own car, he said. . . .

And another story of the school inspector examining the state of the children's teeth. One boy's teeth were in a bad way. The head master was asked for the boy's name and address so that his parents might be notified and a visit to the dentist arranged.

It was the dentist's son.

Satan likes to get a man so busy for God that he neglects his own soul. And time after time, spiritual inefficiency among Christian workers is caused, not by obvious sins, but simply by neglect . . . to use an old phrase, "Neglect of the means of grace."

Space forbids a detailed account of the hindrances in the life of a servant of God. And yet some suggestions ought to be made here. Glance over this list, and answer each question honestly :

Is your hindrance . . .

- i. Neglect of private prayer?
- ii. Neglect of intercession?
- iii. Lack of devotional Bible Reading?
- iv. Lack of expressed love towards God?
- v. Lovelessness towards Christians (individuals or classes)?

- vi. Lack of a deep passion for souls and soul-winning?
- vii. A critical spirit?
- viii. Jealousy of other workers?
- ix. Unbelief of any kind?
- x. Pride?
- xi. Worldliness or compromise?
- xii. Fleshly desire?

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; see if there be any wicked way in me: and lead me in the way everlasting."

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

CHAPTER XI

"PLEAD WITH THE LEADERS"

"My sons, be not now negligent : for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense." 2 Chron. xxix. 11.

CHAPTER XI

"PLEAD WITH THE LEADERS"

DURING a series of meetings in the fair land of New Zealand, I received a letter from a much-used missionary. He had, the previous night, been the first to rise to his feet to confess openly his need of blessing, and it had done my heart good to witness his sparkling honesty.

"I would so much have liked to tell you all to-night," he wrote, "how much harder I found it to confess the sin of powerlessness through failure to maintain the adequate and supreme place in my life of regular daily prayer and communion, *than to speak* in public on God-given revival (as I have done here in Christchurch and throughout the Dominion). Twice last Lord's Day and once on Monday I pleaded with Christians to seek times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Yet last night I was constrained to confess falteringly *my own need*. . . .

"I believe profoundly that Christchurch and all New Zealand will not know God's revival until the *Christian leaders* are themselves broken down in confession as the chief hinderers of the blessing that the windows of Heaven are almost bursting to empty out. I felt it powerfully in last night's meeting . . . may God 'rend the heavens' to-night and 'come down, that the mountains' of prejudice, pride and personally realised but unconfessed sin among preachers and leaders of His people may 'flow at the presence of the Lord.'

"Plead especially with the leaders . . . *Judgment must begin at the House of God*: and as in Hezekiah's revival, the king, priests, levites and rulers must first be restored . . . to sanctify themselves, before revival will spread from a sanctified House of the Lord to all the people."

"Plead especially with the leaders."

Experience has taught me that it is all too necessary. Quite the majority of local revivals which I have seen have begun through the broken confession of a preacher or prominent worker.

My correspondent refers to "personally realised but unconfessed sin." He puts his finger on the trouble right away. One has noticed, times without number, conviction written upon the faces of leaders. All around the common folk are humbling themselves, but the Spirit of God seems to be waiting for the repentance of leaders.

I know that it is difficult for a leader to confess his fault. He may honestly wonder: "Will the people turn against me, or criticise me, if I give them this opportunity of hearing of my shortcomings?"

The conflict and cross-currents turn to a simple tug-of-war. On the one side is fear of God and the other fear of Man. The usual choice appears to suggest that leaders are more afraid of the possible ridicule of men than of the judgment of God.

Listen. I have never seen the work of God suffer

through a leader confessing his fault. God fights a rearguard and a vanguard action for us. If we truly humble ourselves, He protects us—by the simple operation of convicting our critics. He shuts the mouths of the lions. But we are expected to open ours. It suits the Devil when leaders are finally persuaded that they had better keep silence. The result is restraint upon revival.

Oh, what a responsibility lies at the doors of preachers. I have the utmost sympathy with those who feel that their duty in confession exceeds their human courage. Myself I have had the humiliation of being convicted while preaching the Word of God: and I would rather have done anything than do what I ultimately had to do—kneel at the front and ask the people to pray for me.

There is another point to be considered. Leaders sometimes get convicted while attending a far-off Convention or House Party. But they forget that God requires a public humbling before the people at home, even more than where the conviction occurs.

Some years ago Dr. Goforth was about to open a series of meetings at an important centre in China, when a visiting lady missionary came to him with what she called "a sure plan to move the people." Her idea was that he should first confess his sins, then she would confess hers, and afterwards he was

to persuade all the missionaries to confess theirs. The Chinese leaders would naturally follow, and she was certain that by that time every one would have been broken down.

Dr. Goforth replied that the Lord had not led him to see things in that light.

"If I have hindering sins," he said, "they hinder in Honan, where I am known; and the same applies to yourself. So the sooner we return to our respective spheres and get them out of the way the better. To confess our sins before this audience where we are not known, would only waste valuable time."

God's blessing cannot be obtained cheaply.

I remember preaching in a medium-sized town in the Antipodes. We had only one public meeting there. But in the afternoon, I met the Ministers' Fraternal. After talking freely about the hindrances among ministers, I left the meeting open for prayer.

After a long silence, a young minister began to ask the prayers of his colleagues for his own spiritual state, apologising to them for his lack of love towards some, and confessing his prayerless life.

He was followed by others. But before they spoke, I felt a strange urge to say something to him. Addressing him by name, I asked him if he were willing to make the same admissions before his church. He buried his face in his hands, but I felt sure that he would pay the price.

We had a glorious meeting that night. But what delighted me more than anything was to read a long time afterwards that the pastor had humbled himself before his friends at the Sunday morning meeting. A group of young men were raised up by the Spirit for helping in the Sunday evening service. The Holy Spirit fell upon the church in an unmistakable way, and an unusual number of souls were saved, besides Christians revived.

There is one other thing to be noted. The young minister, in my opinion and the opinion of others, was already the most spiritual among the leaders in that town.

This ought to be a lesson for us. The man most out of touch with God is unlikely to be the first to confess his sins. It is the man who walks closely with God who is most conscious of wrong within. So remember that voluntary humbling of a reputed man of God will be a necessary forerunner to the confession of sins by worse backsliders. When a real backslider sees an acknowledged man of God weeping over what he calls "trifles," it makes him tremble to think of his own sins.

The last ditch to be crossed by a Christian leader is *pride*.

The first class of Christians to be moved is the *preacher* class.

The prime reason for so many revivals lacking

permanence is the fact of the people being thoroughly stirred out of all proportion to their leaders. The revivalist, of course, is blamed for the failure of a real work of grace which had been entrusted to unbroken leaders.

"Plead especially with the leaders."

Hence this chapter.

What happens when leaders get tight?

The Old Testament revival under King Hezekiah is the most graphic example.¹

Hezekiah was only twenty-five years of age. Another significant fact. He was young enough for good intentions.

"And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done."

Hezekiah possessed the first requisite of a revivalist. He was anxious to please God, and he put his principles into practice. He was greatly concerned about what the Lord thought of him, and as was said of his father David, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward."

The revival had begun. True, it was not widespread, but spiritual eyes can see that revival had begun in the heart of one willing man. God can

¹ See 2 Chronicles xxix. and xxx. for reference.

start a revival through the obedience of one, for one plus God is an undefeatable majority.

Now Hezekiah did not say to himself: "If I go very gradually, and please the people, I will win their confidence, and bit by bit will bring them to my way of thinking."

No. "He in the *first year* of his reign, in the *first month*, opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them."

And he immediately summoned the Old Testament equivalent of the ministers' fraternal.

"Listen," he said, "sanctify now yourselves and sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry forth the idols (filthiness) out of the holy place."

He recognised that the vessel about to be filled needed to be cleansed without and within. Just as a minister to-day, hoping for revival, will say to himself, "I had better get these whist drives and dances stopped, for whist drives and dances don't go well with revival." Or another might think: "My deacons and elders and leaders need to get right with God first, or the blessing will catch them unprepared."

It is a grand thing when a man, already on fire with revival in his heart, gets his colleagues to work with him for the realisation of his heart's desires.

"My sons," said Hezekiah, "be not now negligent, for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense."

And we may say to our colleagues in the ministry :

"My brethren, don't be negligent. You remember your ordination vows and your own dedication of heart to God, and you know that the Lord hath chosen you to be His representative, and to serve Him."

What happened? It was easier than Hezekiah may have thought.

They arose "and they gathered their brethren, and sanctified themselves, according to the commandment of the king, by the words of the Lord, to cleanse the house of the Lord."

The circle was widening. The influence was increasing. The fire was spreading. The enthusiasm was catching.

Think of how Hezekiah must have felt. When he considered the condition of Church and State, and all the ruin brought about by his father, Ahaz, his heart must have trembled. But now things were moving. God was working. And all because he had dared to do it!

The servants of God caught the spirit of urgency transmitted through Hezekiah. "Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and

on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of the Lord." They did their first job in a week. And what did they do with the idols and uncleanness that they found in the Lord's house? They carried it far away. And they made an end of their work on the sixteenth day of the month. Then they reported to the king.

"We have cleansed all the house of the Lord."

Then they began their worship, and intercession and praise. And the revival was soon in full swing.

What must Hezekiah have thought?

"And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly."

The thing was done suddenly.

And how was it accomplished?

God had prepared the people.

But what was that preparation?

Revival began among the leaders.

The revival was held up at one stage. They could not keep the passover at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together.

The revival was widespread but not complete. When the king's messengers went out urging repentance and submission to God, they travelled far and wide, but many "laughed them to scorn":

some "humbled themselves," and joined in with the faithful followers of the king at Jerusalem.

It is wonderful to notice the catholic simplicity of the King. When many of those who sought the Lord at the passover came without conforming to the rites prescribed, Hezekiah did not worry. He "prayed for them, saying: 'The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his *heart* to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.'"

"And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people." And there was "great gladness" among them. And for seven days, during the feast, the ministers "that taught the good knowledge of the Lord, made peace offerings, making confession to the Lord God of their fathers."

Revival lifted the Kingdom of Judah, and others besides, to a higher plane of spiritual life and material prosperity.

And it all began through the willingness of the leaders to get right with the God whom they professed to serve.

We read that "the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests."

It is strange to compare the willingness of the lay workers of the Church with the willingness of the regular ministers.

"Plead with the leaders."

CHAPTER XII

THE CHURCH MUST FIRST REPENT

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten :
be zealous therefore, and repent." Revelation iii.
19.

CHAPTER XII

THE CHURCH MUST FIRST REPENT

THE occurrence of the word "Repent" in the messages to the Seven Churches is truly remarkable.

The word "Repentance"—in the mind of the average Christian—is connected with sinners and not with professing Christians.

And yet the word used throughout the New Testament in the presentation of the Gospel message to sinners is exactly the same word repeated by our Lord in His messages to the Seven Churches.

The word "Repent" occurs over seven times in these seven messages. It is omitted from two of them—Smyrna, the poor, persecuted Church—for a church in persecution is generally a purified one : and Philadelphia, the loyal Church, the Church that had kept the faith.¹

The noun "metanoia" (repentance) is defined variously as a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of attitude, or a change of direction.

With this information borne in mind, let us examine the uses of the verb in the Revelation.

In the first message, Ephesus is described as an

¹Weymouth readings throughout this chapter. (Rev. ii. and iii.)

energetic church, patiently labouring for God, and perfectly sound in doctrine.

"I know your doings and your toil and your endurance. And I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, but have put to the test those who call themselves Apostles but are not, and you have found them to be liars. And you endure patiently and have borne burdens for My sake and have never flagged.

"Yet I have this against you—that you no longer love Me as you did at first. Be mindful, therefore, of the height from which you have fallen. *Repent* at once, and act as you did at first. . . ."

The (third) message to Pergamos complains of their eating of meat sacrificed to idols, of fornication committed, and of the holding of the hated doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. "Repent!"

Thyatira is likewise rebuked in the fourth message. And again repentance is urged. The dying Church of Sardis is again commanded to repent. And Laodicea is urged to repent as well.

Before we come to the application of these messages, it is appropriate that we should consider the nature of the word "Church," for the simple reason that many people repudiate it as applying to a really Christian Church.

"*Ekklesia*," the word used, may be interpreted "assembly," or "gathering of called-out ones"

or "convention" in the best sense of the word (being convened). It occurs more than a hundred times in the New Testament, and is always translated "Church," with the exception of the instances regarding the Civic Assembly in Ephesus. In the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, the word *Ekklesia* is used along with the Greek for Synagogue to translate the Hebrew *Kahal*, which fact throws further light on the subject. For *Kahal* is used variously in the Old Testament to denote a called-out assembly of Israel or of a tribe: or an assembly gathered out for worship.

So whether we use the word "Church" to denote the general professing Church, or the actual Church of believers, there are lessons to be learned.

It is when we study the message to the Church of the Laodiceans that we find our message.

The condition of the Laodicean Church fits our present-day state in Christendom exactly.

"I know your doings—you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, before long I will vomit you out of My mouth.

"You say 'I am rich, and have wealth stored up, and I stand in need of nothing'; and you do not know that if there is a wretched creature it is you—pitiable, poor, blind, naked.

"Therefore I counsel you to buy of Me gold refined in the fire that you may become rich, and white robes to put on to hide your shameful nakedness, and eyesalve to anoint your eyes with, so that you may be able to see.

"All whom I hold dear, I reprove and chastise; therefore be in earnest and repent. See, I am now standing at the door and knocking. If anyone listens to My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and feast with him, and he shall feast with me. . . ."

Can this be made to apply to the spiritual condition of believers? Let us see.

First of all, Laodicea was an *ekklesia*, a gathered-out assembly for worship. Secondly, it is suggested that this church was in a peculiar relationship with the Lord, because of the words: "All whom I hold dear, I reprove and chastise."

"For whom the Lord loveth," says the writer of Hebrews, "He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

Which makes me think that the rebuke given Laodicea may be fairly applied to believers.

Lukewarmness, self-satisfaction, half-heartedness, backsliding, formalism, indifference, self righteousness, greed for gold, worldliness, pride, self-deception, spiritual destitution, blindness and lack of vision, easily-seen-through—these are the characteristics of Laodicea, and these are the characteristics abounding to-day.

What would anyone think of an individual who possessed all these characteristics? Surely the greatest backslider living!

But examine the position collectively. Are there any lukewarm Christians in your church? Any self-satisfied? Any indifferent? Any self-righteous? Any backsliding? Any formalistic? Any half-hearted? Any greedy after lucre? Any worldly? Any proud? Any self-deceived? Any spiritually destitute? Any without vision? Any shameless? Put together they look rather bad.

If the majority of your church members share a majority of these indications of spiritual poverty, then your church is a Laodicean church. And if the majority of churches in your district are thus backslidden, then everything said to Laodicea applies to your neighbourhood.

What would you do with an individual Christian who was thus backslidden in heart and life?

You would first pray for him. You would seek to show him his need. You would seek to make

him concerned about his need. You would point out to him the life more abundant. You would tell him that Calvary means power, and that Christ will restore.

All that has been said about individuals applies with equal force to the larger groups in which individual Christians find themselves a place. The life of the majority of churches and societies is sub-normal, stunted in growth, paralysed instead of powerful. What is the trouble? It is just general backsliding.

The author was once told by an agnostic:

"I think I would be a Christian *only* for the Christians."

Another man, of communistic views, is reported having said to a parson:

"I have a sneaking regard for your Jesus, but I am sure I see no connection between Him and the life of your church."

Churches, and all other groups of Christians, are just like individuals—either they are growing in grace or else they are backsliding. Such backsliding is often a vicious circle, for spiritual poverty produces worldliness, and worldliness brings greater spiritual poverty. Little by little, the church loses its grip on essential things, becomes a social club, goes to sleep or flies off at a tangent.

All over the world we find sleeping churches, and all round them are the gospel-starved masses.

Instead of performing the first thing of importance, evangelising the masses, they are engaged in a bewildering variety of pastimes—anything but the real thing.

It has pleased the Lord to intervene at times to bring back His people to a more normal life. This is called *revival*. Revival, it must be noted, is solely the concern of believers, and is not an evangelistic campaign as many seem to think, although such a gospel effort may be the outcome of revival among Christians. The greatest need of the churches to-day is revival.

Revival is, of course, a matter for individuals as well as churches—and in such cases, it is often called 'full surrender', or 'a clean heart', or 'victory over sin',—the term is not of such vast importance provided we recognise that the experience is simply the forsaking of a sub-normal experience for the normal Christian life. This is individual revival.

Returning to the words of Scripture, we find the message of the Lord blunt and powerful.

"Therefore I counsel you to buy of Me gold tried in the fire that you may become rich, and white robes to put on to hide your shameful nakedness, and eyesalve to anoint your eyes with so that you may be able to see."

There is no mistaking what the Lord thinks of that Church. His denunciation "You say that you stand in need of nothing" is met by an offer of pure gold instead of dross, clothing instead of shame, ointment to cure the blindness.

"All whom I hold dear, I reprove and chastise; be in earnest therefore and repent!"

Again, repentance! What does it mean?

Be in earnest, and change your warped mind, change your backslidden heart, change your wrong attitude, change your contrary direction. Repent!

The next exhortation is one of mixed tenderness and urgency. It is better quoted in the Authorised Version:

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with Me."

This plea, preached so often with effect to unregenerate sinners, would be even more effective with believers in the Church.

It is the Lord Christ Who stands outside the door of the Laodicean Church. He is patiently, tenderly knocking. Few hear Him, and many of those that do are too busy with other things to open the door. And those that are eager to open the door are often hindered by others who stand in the way. Still He is knocking.

To the individual, there is wonderful comfort.

Christ does not say, "If you persuade all the rest to let Me in——" but rather "*If any man hear My voice——*"

Individual responsibility is as great regarding revival as regarding salvation. Letting Christ into the heart means revival for the individual who does it. If "revival is the reception by the church of life abundant," revival is also reception by the individual of the life abundant.

Revival has always begun through the obedience of individuals. Four young men, together with individuals scattered throughout the Province, prayed down the Ulster Revival of 1859.

Evan Roberts and other individual servants of God prayed down the Welsh Revival of 1904. God lit little fires here and there, in individual hearts, and when they became numerous, the place went on fire.

Andrew Gih, listening to a plea made by Paget Wilkes, in Shanghai, did not wait until the rest of China was moved. He opened his heart to revival, and God has been using him as a revivalist ever since.

Instances could be multiplied.

"If any man hear My voice, I will come in and sup with him, and he with Me."

Revival must begin somewhere. It must begin in some heart. *Who knows but it might start with you?*

Many Christians are waiting for a collective stirring, something which will be labelled "revival" right away. God is waiting for individual stirrings, and He is waiting for you.

Get the perspective right. "If any man . . ."

The Church will be moved when its members are moved. Who will be one of Revival's advance guard?

And so the fact remains, revival is the greatest need of both individual and Church. We must not regard revival as some supernatural occurrence which we cannot understand. Revival for the individual is simply *deeper blessing*. Revival in the Church is simply *deeper blessing*. And deeper blessing is the reward for growth in grace. One finds that certain groups of Christians and certain schools of thought put forward their own formulæ for revival. It is our strong conviction that God's truth is always simple—it has nothing complicated about it. The Lord stirs up His people in many mysterious ways, but the fact remains, He has promised revival to those who ask, to those who will pay the price.

Thus we see the greatest tragedy of all—this paralysing, deadly backsliding is wholly unnecessary, wholly uncalled for. At any time, an individual or a church may receive "blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Sin is very deceptive. The backslider or

backsliding Church makes all the excuses possible for the deplorable state of backsliding and powerlessness. There may be a noticeable amount of energy—that is all part of the pretence. Backsliders see so few *better than themselves* that they begin to feel secure—they lull themselves to sleep, and snore so loudly that they cannot hear the call "Awake."

But many individuals feel a sense of disappointment and failure. Their hearts are hungry for deeper blessing. Many more pretend that their lives are all right, when they are not all right. They are more dangerous than conscious backsliders, for they are always praying for blessing upon "somebody else," ignoring their own greater need.

Pretence and disappointment—disappointment and pretence. This is the condition of multitudes of starved Christians. The author has been privileged to witness God's power manifested in many genuine revivals—and it has always been noticed that those who are disappointed get a glimpse of new hope: those who pretend get shown up.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting."

The important thing to remember is:
Repentance is the prelude to revival.
The Church must first Repent.

MORECAMBE

10.10.10.10.

F. C. ATKINSON



TEACH ME OBEDIENCE

Father, I know I need Thee more and more :
 Add now some blessing, further grace outpour;
 Teach me obedience to Thy blessed will
 That all Thy blest commands I may fulfil.

Too often have I wanted mine own way ;
 Break my resistance—teach me to obey :
 Engrave Thy will more deeply on my heart,
 That I may surely know and do my part.

I know the cure for all depressing doubt :
 I know I must needs yield and turn about
 To follow all the leadings of my Lord,
 Obeying His known will and written Word.

So, Lord, again I gladly yield to Thee,
 Fully presenting every faculty :
 Purge me, O Lord—Thy servant sanctify :
 Use even me Thy Christ to magnify.

J. EDWIN ORR.